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ABSTRACT

The report focuses on prevention and intervention strategies for reducing violent and vandalistic behavior of alienated secondary school youth, particularly those from minority groups. Suggestions are offered for regular and resource teachers as well as others concerned with adolescents presenting behavior problems. Initial sections address a description of the alienated youth population, the cycle of frustration and failure experienced by minority youth, disruptive behavior as a public problem, parental responsibility, and the role of the school. The School Climate Approach to prevention is explained to deal with improving interpersonal relationships among students, parents, teachers, and the school community with emphases on self image, academic skill and human relations skill development. It is stressed that the multidisciplinary concept is necessary for effective intervention with alienated youth. Psychological consequences of alienation as well as benefits from intervention are also mentioned. (SBH)

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Rationale

There is increasing realization that the schools must assume greater responsibility for meeting the needs of alienated youth. Much of their violent and vandalistic behavior can be alleviated by using appropriate strategies. The initiative for assuming this responsibility begins with an understanding of the interrelationships among the personnel in the schools and various other agencies.

Accumulating evidence suggests that a disproportionate number of adolescents who engage in disruptive behavior are from minority groups.

It is possible that much of the malbehavior exhibited by youth occurs because they generally tire of monotonous routine and desired new, more stimulating experiences in the school setting.

Rather than viewing the students as being disruptive, inferior, lazy, present oriented, and irresponsible, they should be motivated to act as responsible, independent, goal seeking and creative individuals. The major focus should be the reintegration of adolescents in the regular education setting.

Thus, it is necessary to develop intervention strategies to assist teachers, counselors and other personnel in dealing with these chronic problems which are often caused by the alienated youth. Unfortunately, many of these youth appear to have the capacity for alienating the persons who are attempting to help them.

Available evidence reveals several major contributing causes of disruptive behavior among alienated youth. These are: poverty, social disruption, unwholesome environment, and limited vocational opportunities.

Appropriate intervention strategies are being proposed to translate theory and practice into a more meaningful program for alienated minority youth. The "school climate model" is attracting considerable attention and the concept is proving to be a viable means of producing a significant decrease in deviant behavior. This approach implies the total involvement of school personnel from the school custodian to the principal.

This report will focus on prevention and intervention strategies for reducing violent and vandalistic behavior of alienated secondary school youth. Suggestions will be offered for regular teachers, resource teachers and other personnel concerned with adolescents who present behavior problems.

Who Are The Alienated Youth?

One of the present crucial imperatives facing educators is the urgent need for viable programs to meet the unique requirements of alienated minority youth.

Alienated youth are described as those who have been rejected by society, or caused to be set apart as a group. Hendricks and Jones (1972) concede that the parameters of student alienation are somewhat difficult to define but identify alienated youth as adolescents who rebel against institutional authority and reject the traditional values of society.

Many of the alienated youth are bright minority students who are not reaching their academic potential. Environmentally related adjustment problems reduce the likelihood that these students will remain in school and complete their studies. These students are generally unprepared psychologically to cope with the demands of the school and the concomitant environmental problems.

Clinical evaluations of many students who exhibit disruptive behavior reveal a need for emotional support from some significant adult. Researchers have found ample evidence to indicate that the home contributes minimally toward helping the minority child acquire a sense of trust, and a feeling of dignity and worth. Hence, the black child fails to receive the sense of importance and self esteem he needs and assumes early independence from the home and begins to rely on peers and others to provide emotional support. (Samuda, 1975)

Coleman (1978) is of the opinion that a change in the family is of prime importance in creating a change in the environment for young persons. Unfortunately, "children are less and less central to the family, and family life is less and less appropriate for the needs of children and especially young persons emerging from childhood." Cited among the indicators are the extremely high divorce rate, family disorganization, high incidence of child abuse and the astounding number of children who run away from home each year. These indices suggest a mandate for greater parental involvement in providing a wholesome physical and psychological environment for children and youth.

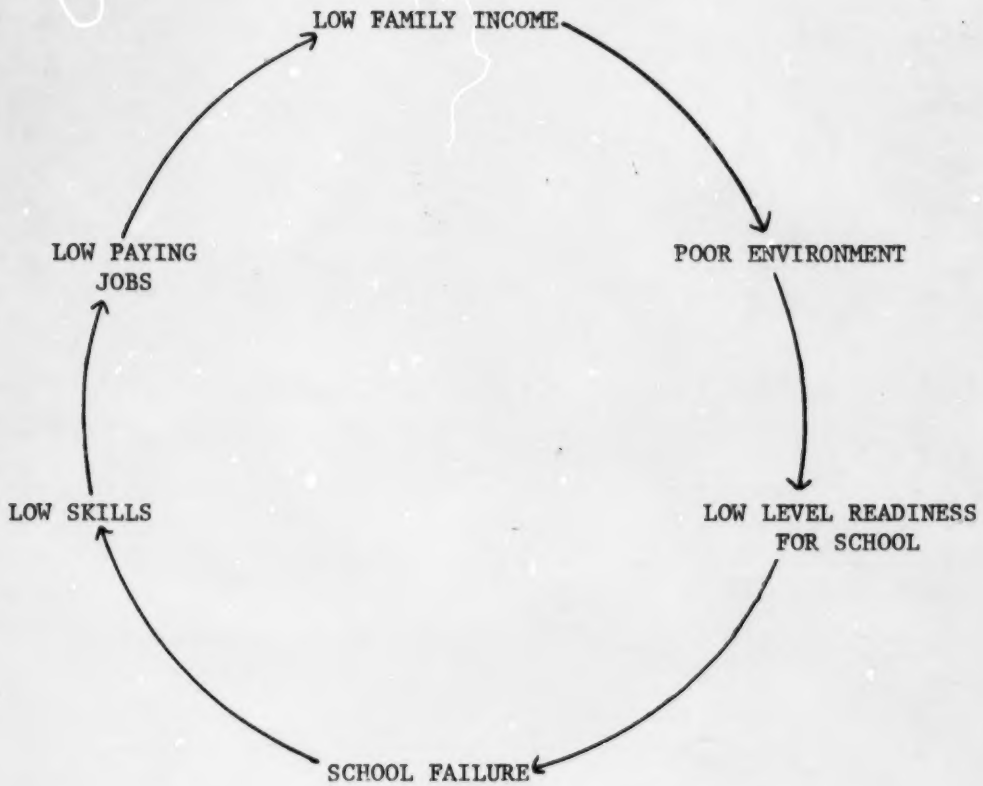
Cycle of Frustration and Failure

Research indicates that minority youth are more likely than youth members of other groups to suffer from the adverse effects of a poor environment, low level readiness for school, school failure, low skills, low paying jobs and low family income.

The effects of an inadequately stimulating and non-reinforcing environment can be observed in the lack of readiness for school that is characteristic of most low achieving students.

Alienated minority youth rarely have an opportunity to observe the positive side of family life; love, caring, sharing, personal regard, concern for others, commitment and close-knit family relationships.

These conditions lead to what is termed by Knight (1979) as a cycle of frustration and failure.



Disruptive Behavior a Public Problem

Among the major concerns of educators is the awareness that disruptive behavior among youth is a public problem. Traditionally, disruptive behavior has been viewed as a school or family problem. Presently, however, other agencies are beginning to acknowledge the extent and seriousness of the problem.

Recent statistics released by the Children's Defense Fund, a national civil rights group, indicate that disciplinary problems constitute the major cause of the more than two million school age children leaving public schools. The problem with suspending or expelling students from school is not a solution.

Too often these students tend to become permanent dropouts. These dropouts inevitably become community problems, later joining the unemployed, the lawbreakers, the rebellious, and the delinquent. In addition to their dropping out and becoming community problems they lose the benefit of an adequate education.

Rebell (1975) questions whether students on suspension are receiving adequate alternative instruction. One concern is that the two-hour-a-day home instruction may not be meeting the statutory requirements for full-time instruction. He notes that "the suitability of this approach in educational and social terms has yet to receive full professional and judicial scrutiny."

Parental Responsibility

Taichert (1973) views parental attitudes and conflicts as a source of disturbed behavior in children. She notes:

> Delinquent or antisocial childhood behavior is made possible by patterns of verbal and non-verbal communication within the family. Unresolved, antisocial parental attitudes and conflicts are frequently observed in the antisocial acting-out behavior.

Parents of disruptive children are sometimes unaware of what the schools requirements are, thus, may be unable to identify the reasons for certain patterns of behavior. This lack of knowledge, however, does not reduce the parents responsibility for their children's actions. There is mounting evidence that parents are seeking to ameilorate the behavior problems of adolescents.

Under a number of States' compulsory school attendance laws, for example, parents are held responsible if their children are habitually absent from school. It is judged to be the parents responsibility to contact the school if it is suspected that a student may not be reporting to school once they left home. Most educators concede that the legal system should be the last resort and used only when students have missed an excessive number of days from school.

The Role of the School

The schools are viewed by Glasser (1977) as the primary molding places of our society. He contends that they mold either successful, strong and responsible citizens or failing, weak and irresponsible citizens. He concedes, however, that it takes time and consistency, but students must understand that they are responsible for their actions.

Lovitt (1978) observes that although it may be necessary to work out ways to reduce or eliminate certain behaviors, it should be accomplished within the context of a developmental educational program.

The decreasing adequacy of the environment within which young people are growing up is noted by Coleman (1978). He cautions, however, that the school is not the principal cause of this inadquacy; but warns that this does not mean that the school cannot act as a partial remedy for the situation.

Prevention Strategies

Several authors have documented similarities of alienated youth in school and have presented ways in which the patterns may be altered. Among these are special assemblies, homeroom discussions, individual counseling sessions, group counseling, peer counseling, variable scheduling, trained hall monitors and access to alternative programs.

In summarizing what research says to the teacher with regard to coping with disruptive behavior, Davis (1974) concluded that this type of behavior occurs in the classroom because of conflicts in the roles assumed by the students. Suggested methods for preventing disruptive behavior include; a well organized, interesting and convenient classroom, a well planned curriculum which ensures that students understand the relation between what they are

learning and future job requirements, and a teacher's style which complements the behavior of the students.

The School Climate Approach

In view of the increasing number of youthful offenders re-entering the public schools from detention facilities, youth development centers and those who are presently enrolled, the problems of alienated youth is one of the imperatives assuming importance in the schools.

The primary task of educators is to explore some ways in which the violent and aggressive behavior can be reduced or eliminated among minority adolescents. Several programs could serve as possible models but the school climate approach is judged to be more feasible. The basic assumption, of course, is that the parents or guardians will be actively involved in the educational program. The extent of involvement will be determined by the time devoted to the problem and the level of enthusiasmof the parents and the persons planning and implementing the program.

The major purpose of the school climate model is to improve the affective environment within the schools. Of particular concern is the improvement of interpersonal relationships among students, parents, teachers and the school community. Other emphases include self-image development, academic skill and human relations skill development.

The basic rationale for establishing this approach is that existing programs are ineffective and are not meeting the needs of the students. There is increasing realization that the great diversity of needs require multidisciplinary cooperation. The adoption of this approach to solving the problems of alienated youth appears to be a viable alternative.

The school climate approach ensures a more meaningful educational experience for students with academic problems. The success of a coordinated Vocational-

Academic Education Program has been reported by Sowell (1978) at Evans High School in Augusta, Georgia. The program organized and implemented by Dennis Whitfield is aimed at potential drop-outs who are failure prone, find school experience frustrating, have a high absentee rate and are generally disinterested in school. By placing these youth in a special vocationally oriented program with an educational prescription, and given individualized instruction, 92 percent of the potential dropouts improved their reading or math levels and completed their education.

One of the principal problems facing school administrators is the disruptive behavior of students and the concomitant problems associated with vandalism. The degree to which disruptive behavior can be changed is a topic of considerable discussion. Because of the magnitude of the problem, it is being given high priority in educational planning.

It is possible, however, that a study of the organizational patterns of most schools would reveal that administrators have failed to establish and implement an effective program for alleviating disruptive behavior. The scope of the problem has been identified but there is a paucity of information on the topic. A continuing problem according to Neill (1978) is that many administrators prefer to keep incidents as quiet as possible in order to protect students, as well as protect schools from adverse publicity.

There are conflicting opinions regarding the most appropriate educational arrangement for alienated youth. Some educators believe that a separate school is needed to provide the kind of services required for disruptive students. Proponents of the special school concept argue that isolating these students would improve the learning environment in the regular classes. Other educators favor the alternative learning program where the students would report to the special room for one class period each day or for the entire day depending on

the severity of the behavior. A number of successful alternative programs have been established. Among these are:

1) The "School Within a School" program which operates during the first four periods of the regular school day and allows junior and senior high school students to select afternoon classes of their choice.

2) The "Character Oriented Optional Learning Program" is an alternative school program designed for junior high school students who are unable to adjust to the normal school environment.

3) The "In School Suspension Center" is reported to be a successful arrangement for reducing the number of suspensions, explusions and referrals for disciplinary infractions among junior high school students.

Intervention Strategies

To meet the challenge of youth alienation, the multidisciplinary concept is necessary. This concept implies that changes must occur in social institutions other than schools, businesses, government agencies, neighborhoods and the courts.

To remedy the situation, Wynne (1978) states that "we must strive to change the nature of human interaction in our schools." While it is generally conceded that the school is not the major cause nor the primary agent of change, it is imperative that schools assume a more active role in minimizing the factors that lead to alienation.

It is clearly evident that the schools must provide a variety of education options to meet the special needs of alienated youth. Some of these options include: 1) a highly individualized teaching approach; 2) a curriculum geared to students' ability and rate of progress; 3) emphasis on basic skills in all subject areas; and 4) development of Interest Centers with areas for subject and group reading, listening centers, communications and creative activity.

Other intervention strategies include: specialized curriculum and instructional programs; organizational modifications; high interest materials, counseling services, peer tutoring and security systems. There is agreement among educators that unless intervention occurs these youth are destined to a frustrating life of mediocrity.

Psychological Consequences of Alienation

As the number of alienated youth with severe problems increases, the requirements and need for support services will also increase. Among the consequences of alienation are: 1) low concept of self; 2) failure prone; 3) low frustration tolerance; 4) social maladjustment; 5) unable to delay gratification; 6) mistrust authority; 7) sense of personal inadequacy; 8) inclination toward loneliness, withdrawal and self-destruction; 9) attitude of not caring; and 10) irreversible emotional damage. Hence, there is a growing need to develop and implement effective educational and social programs which will ensure that these youth become useful and productive citizens.

Smith, et al. (1979) contend that teacher education programs must become more involved in demonstrating and disseminating new techniques of behavior management through preservice and inservice training. Many teachers apparently believe that corporal punishment is the ultimate method of controlling their classes and the only discipline that students understand. Thus, changing teacher attitudes may constitute the initial hurdle.

Benefits to be Derived from Focus on Alienation

The successful implementation of a school-based program would save taxpayers money. Recent statistics indicate that the cost of institutional care exceeds the cost of keeping these youth in the public school system. Other benefits

include: 1) increased self-esteem; 2) decrease in discipline problems; 3) lower dropout rates; 4) increased scores on standardized tests; 5) increased level of skills; 6) increased employability; and 7) higher standard of living.

Summary

Alienated youth have generally experienced some degree of frustration and failure in attempting to cope with the demands of the environment. These youth are often unable to hold themselves accountable for their actions. Thus, require the expertise of trained counselors. Unfortunately, the current policy with regard to school counseling seems to be geared to students who are college bound.

Contrary to popular belief, alienated youth are likely to come from all social and economic backgrounds. Research indicates, however, that a disproportionate number of minority group adolescents engage in aggressive and disruptive behavior.

The school climate approach is consistent with the philosophy of humanistic education and is suggested as a model for alleviating disruptive behavior. This concept implies concern for the social, emotional and educational needs of alienated youth.

The multidisciplinary approach is viewed as a means of fostering a positive approach to discipline, learning and interpersonal relationships. In addition to the schools, such an approach involves the family, community leaders as well as numerous support agencies.

Variable scheduling, under the alternate school plan, appears to be one of the most satisfactory ways of maintaining a wholesome classroom environment. This plan represents a departure from the same routine and eliminates the element of sameness in the organizational pattern of the school.

A viable solution to the myriad of problems requires the shared concern of parents, teachers, school administrators and community leaders. The basic message to educators, however, is that the schools must become more involved in alleviating the problems of alienated youth.

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